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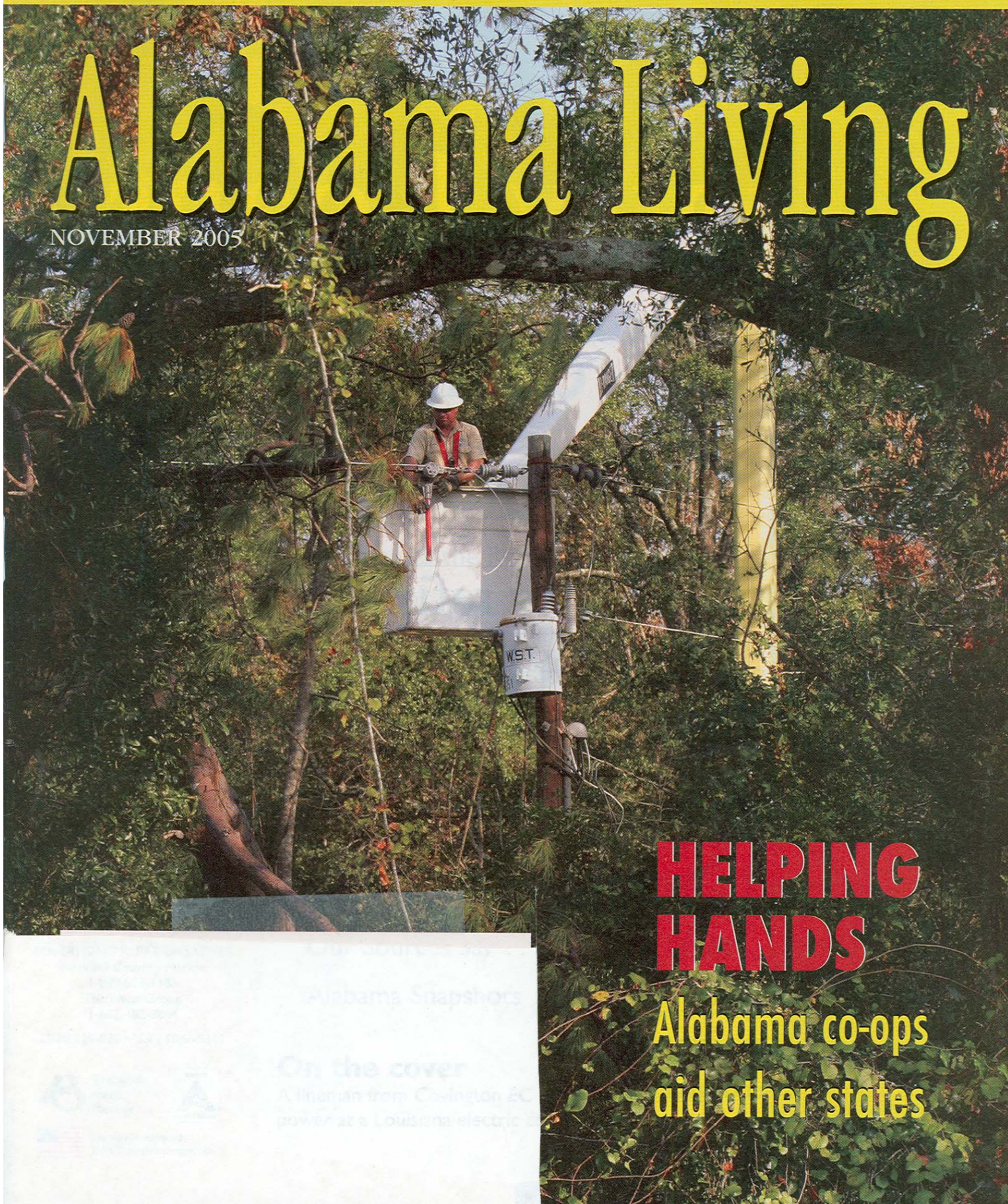
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One Man's **Mission**

Wiregrass EC member **Ronnie Davis** used his mapping skills gained in the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service to help a Mississippi town find itself after Katrina

By Julie Best



Alabama National guardsman Ronnie Davis has served overseas in Kosovo and seen numerous disasters. Still nothing prepared him for the destruction he saw following Hurricane Katrina.

"It was like nothing I've ever seen before," Davis says. "Our primary mission was to provide security and to help the local authorities restore order."

A 36-year veteran of the Guard, Davis is attached to the 1204th Engineering Company in Slocum and a member of Wiregrass Electric Cooperative. His unit was called up to assist with the Hurricane Katrina efforts in Ocean Springs, Miss.

When he arrived the only maps available were tourist-type roadmaps, Davis says. In his full-time career, Davis is a soil conservation technician working for USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), in Geneva. In that capacity, he works daily with digital data to produce conservation plans for farmers in Geneva County. Davis knew what digital data was



Davis, right, with Ocean Springs map

available through NRCS, he was familiar with the equipment needed to produce the product, and knew how valuable the maps would be to those working in the relief effort.

"I asked permission to send a few of my fellow guardsmen to pick up what we call a DTSS (digital topographic support system), which is a topographic system that we can use to produce maps and shape files," Davis says.

His commanding officer agreed, so now Davis needed access to the digital data.

"I knew that NRCS would have the data needed to develop maps for the local network," he says. "I knew NRCS had the information that was needed to produce the maps."

A phone call to his home county put things in motion. Through the NRCS network, the NRCS mapping center in Texas put together the data needed for the entire southern portion of Mississippi from Interstate 20 to the Gulf of Mexico. The data were sent overnight to Davis at the Ocean Springs, Miss., headquarters.

"When we arrived in Mississippi, the local utilities were not available," he says. "With these maps, we could pin-point the local need. Not only did we produce maps for our own unit, we produced maps for the local police, state troopers from other states, and large maps for FEMA for distribution points."

"You've got to understand that this area was devastated. The local police had one map mounted on a wall. You can imagine how difficult it was to try to direct people to go to various places with only one map to work with. The maps we produced helped provide a framework for relief efforts in the Ocean Springs area." 